

**Return our nation's dignity!**  
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After 51 years of mismanagement by the Barisan Nasional government, our nation has totally lost its dignity. But on Aug 26, a flame was lit in Permatang Pauh to dispel the darkness and gloom in our country. The people have entrusted this flame to Anwar Ibrahim who will carry it to parliament and hopefully to Putrajaya, to enlighten the whole nation and return our long lost dignity.  
MCPX

Amidst the celebration of Anwar's decisive victory in the by-election, let me tell you the story of our nation and the factors that led to our current sad state of affairs. We begin with our much beloved national anthem – the Negaraku.

The original 1957 version of the national anthem Negaraku was a majestic composition of soulful musical notes accompanied by a stirring tempo that instilled a sense of patriotism and belonging in me whenever it was played. It didn't matter whether the tune originated from the popular song 'Terang Bulan' or the Hawaiian serenade 'Mamula Moon' by Felix Mendelssohn.

To me, the original national anthem was perfectly arranged to carry those beautiful lyrics emanating from our hearts as they soar into the great Malaysian sky.

Then in 1992, the government changed its tempo into a marching rhythm and stripped our national symbol of all reverence. It became a vile piece of circus music which symbolised BN's misrule and the rape of our country's resources under the Mahathir administration.

The draining of our nation's wealth continued on and in 2003, during the period of power transition from Mahathir to Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the national anthem was once again altered by the composer Wah Idris. By then, the Negaraku has been transformed into an ambiguous piece of music with a nondescript beginning and a confused ending, reflecting the persona of our current Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

No doubt Wah Idris has added a few flourishes in the composition and reduced the pace of the tempo, but it failed to rekindle the romance and dignity of the original version.

The story of our national anthem resembles the nation's progress from independence until today. We started out full of hope and vision, and then in midway, our ideals were sabotaged by the very government we voted in to protect us. After 51 years of political rummaging and ransacking, the nation is left dry and deserted – stripped of all dignity, like our Negaraku itself.

For half a century, BN has done everything in their power to tarnish the image of our once vibrant country. Instead of hard work and resilience, our leaders have chosen short-cut ways to develop the nation. One-sided policies, nepotism and cronyism have created an uncompetitive population who have no power nor drive to compete with the outside world.

Corruption has become the norm rather than the exception in our once respected civil service. Prodded on by the laissez-faire attitude of our leaders, civil servants have risen to become the masters of the people instead of the other way round. These 1.15 million

'mini-sultans' have evolved into a monolith of lethargy and inertia; slowing down further whatever minuscule progress we have left in our country.

It is even more deplorable to see politicians who have been tainted with allegations of corruption and other crimes, being recycled election after election, some even going on to become leaders in the government. Do they not feel any shame at all even though they know the whole world is watching and most probably laughing at them?

When we have unqualified leaders like that, it is no wonder that our country lost billions of ringgit throughout the years from mismanagement and dubious bail-outs of politically affiliated companies. The nation's wealth and resources are then further wasted on 'white elephant' mega projects which always seem to fill the bulging pockets of a few and bring little benefit to the common people.

And then, as if we have a hidden treasure chest with unending supply of money, our leaders sponsor ridiculous record breaking feats and built unnecessary monuments to lull themselves into thinking that the nation has achieved something momentous. These leaders and their followers might be blind enough to be easily satisfied with their self-proclaimed achievements, but the people of Malaysia are fed up with their antics.

To further fuel the people's anger, our underachieving government will award Datukships to our underachieving Olympiad athletes who only managed to garner a silver medal or two for the country. This confirms the government's lack of commitment towards excellence; something which is ingrained in the government machinery all these years. How can the nation be a successful if we continue to encourage Malaysians to be underachievers while the whole world is going for the ultimate gold?

I must reiterate here that rewards are important inducements for success and excellence. But the rewards should be proper and beneficial to further the growth of the recipient and not merely feudal titles which have been cheapened by our politicians throughout these years.

The dignity of the nation is further eroded when the government blatantly misuses religion to create fear amongst the multiethnic people of Malaysia. Religion is being used to frustrate the efforts of Anwar Ibrahim to enter Parliament and possibly become the next prime minister. Umno has also used religion many times to exude a 'holier than thou' disposition when confronting the opposition party PAS.

But on top of all that, I believe the last remnants of our nation's dignity have been completely swept away by the continuous use of the Internal Security Act to stifle dissenting voices and to incarcerate visionary leaders. We call ourselves a democratic nation but the government has no qualms in denying the people the very first tenet of democracy – the freedom of speech.

Malaysia will be celebrating its 51st year of independence from the British this weekend and my fervent wish for this Merdeka Day is for our nation's dignity to be returned to us. Only a visionary leader who believes in justice, freedom and equality will be able to do that.

May Anwar Ibrahim's path from Permatang Pauh to parliament be clearly lit and may he have the perseverance and strength to lead the nation to success. Let us hope that this 51st anniversary will mark the first year of our nation's reformation.

Very soon, we will be able to sing the Negaraku with pride, joy and dignity again.

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